

As of November 22 of this year, there were 607 mass shootings in the US. That is almost two mass shootings – generally defined as 4 or more dead, not including the shooter – in this country every single day of the year. That is a truly shocking number. And that number doesn't include the numerous killings that aren't the product of mass shootings. It is clear that we are once again engaged in a great civil war, but unlike the first Civil War, it's not at all clear why. An army of confused and aggrieved young men – yes, it is always men, and they are generally young – take up arms and randomly turn them on their fellow citizens. It is as though some violent and irrational force seizes them one by one, and they have no choice but to arm themselves, go to a public place and shed as much blood as possible before they are either caught or turn the weapon upon themselves. If every war tells a story about the people who wage it, the story this war tells is of a people barely in control of themselves, a people whose anger regularly boils over into homicidal rage.

How did we get here? For starters, we are a country awash in firearms. 393 million of them. We have more guns than people. Is there any reason to be surprised that we are also awash in gun violence? Imagine for a moment that, instead of guns, there were 393 million flame throwers in people's hands. Is there any doubt that we'd have a similar epidemic of flamethrower attacks? When that impulse to kill took hold of a person, they would naturally turn to the one device in their possession that could rapidly kill or wound a large number of people, and a flamethrower fits the bill. In that world we'd have the National Flamethrower Association telling us that flamethrowers don't kill people, people kill people. They would patiently explain that if every good guy had a flamethrower, the bad guys could be dealt with.

In the political sphere, Republican politicians would be tripping over themselves to demonstrate their support for a person's right to own and carry flamethrowers. Looking to burnish their image on education, they would helpfully pass a law providing flame retardant clothing to all students. In the legal sphere, Justice Thomas, writing for the majority of the Supreme Court, would hold that under Bruen, flamethrowers are historically "analogous" to the muskets that were in use when our constitution was passed, and as such are fully protected by the Second Amendment. Finally, in the fashion sphere, glossy magazines would feature pictures of beautiful young women walking down the street,

flamethrowers tossed jauntily over their dainty shoulders, followed by the byline: "Safe has never been so sexy."

It's not difficult to imagine this world because it's basically our current world with a slight twist. If you can imagine that alternate reality, perhaps you can also imagine this: a month without a single mass shooting in the country; a month without dozens of families mourning the loss of their mothers, children and siblings; a month without bloodstained streets with chalk drawings in the shape of fallen bodies. A month, in short, when people just lived their lives rather than mourned for lives lost to gun violence. An impossible scenario? It is impossible if we continue to value guns more than people's lives, and if our common sense continues to be held hostage by the NRA.

One might well ask, aren't our hands tied by the Second Amendment? After all, the Supreme Court has held in a pair of decisions that Americans have a right to own guns in their home (Heller) and carry them in most public places (Bruen). It is true that the Supreme Court in our country is the final arbiter of legal questions. It is also true, however, that just as all humans are fallible, so too are all human institutions, including the Supreme Court. The pair of decisions interpreting the Second Amendment was overreach by the Court. They directly conflict with government's chief responsibility: protecting its citizens from harm. The ongoing massacre that has been made possible by the omnipresence of firearms represents a stunning failure by our government to protect its own citizens. While the Court's decisions surely haven't caused the epidemic of firearm deaths, they make it difficult, if not impossible, for the states and federal government to regulate guns in a way that would effectively reduce the number of firearm deaths.

It is time our government recognized that protecting its citizens is more important than protecting its own institutions, even when that institution is the Supreme Court. The Court went off the rails when it decided Heller and Bruen. It similarly went off the rails when it decided Plessy v. Ferguson, which held that separate accommodations for Black and White people did not violate the Constitution. Would the other branches of government at the time Plessy was decided have been justified, perhaps even morally obligated, to refuse to enforce the decision? If the answer is yes, why should our government take a more

deferential position toward the pair of Second Amendment decisions that are feeding the civil war in which we find ourselves embroiled?

It is time the legislative and executive branches of our federal government, and each of the states, made a choice. Will they side with their citizens and do what is necessary to stop the slaughter that firearms daily wreak upon our people? Or will they side with the NRA aligned Supreme Court and allow its insane jurisprudence to permit the slaughter to continue? The era of throwing up our hands up in despair and saying this is just how it is in the US has to end. Fate hasn't decreed that we must be a country of endless firearm violence. It is time that we adopted a more sensible approach to gun control. If this government is truly of the people, by the people and for the people, then it must do what is necessary to protect the people. It is within our power to achieve that goal, if we choose to exercise the power.